HAROLD DADFORD WEST, Ph.D., LL.D., F.A.I.C.

Dr. Harold Dadford West, president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, for 13 years, 1952-65, died on March 5, 1974 at the age of 69. He was the first Afro-American to head the institution and in 1963, the first to serve on the State Board of Education. He became the first honorary member of the National Medical Association in 1964.

Dr. West was born July 16, 1904, in Flemington, New Jersey, the son of George H. and Mary Ann Toney West. He attended public schools in New Jersey and Connecticut before moving to Washington, D.C. where he graduated from the 8th grade at the Birney School in Anacostia and from the Dunbar High School in 1921. There he was a classmate of the senior author of this tribute.

He received his earned degrees from the University of Illinois: the B.S. in 1925, the M.S. in 1930 and the Ph.D. in 1937. Morris Brown College in Atlanta awarded him an honorary LL.D. in 1955. He had served Morris Brown as professor of chemistry and head of the Department of Science from 1925 to 1927.

Dr. West came to Meharry as associate professor of physiological chemistry in 1927 and became professor and chairman of the Department in 1938. He held this post until 1952, when he became the fifth president of the medical college and returned to his first love, biochemistry, following his retirement as president in 1965.

Dr. West's research in biochemistry was concerned with the synthesis and resolution of the essential amino acid, threonine, and its large scale preparation; a method for differentiation of the smegma and tuberculosis bacilli; the role of sulfur in biological detoxification mechanisms; blood serum calcium levels in the Negro in relation to possible significance in tuberculosis; relation of B-vitamins, especially pantothenic acid, to detoxification of sulfa-drugs and susceptibility to bacillary disease; demonstration of a procedure by which radio-active silver can be localized at selected sites in the animal body; the discovery of biocerin—an antibiotic produced by *Bacillus cereus*; the demonstration that radioactive silver accumulates in spontaneous and experimentally induced abscesses as well as in certain fibrous and mixed tumors and the suggestion of radio-silver as a possible means of diagnosis and therapy; application of infra-red spectroscopy to the study of certain aromatic hydrocarbons and mercapturic acids; utilization of radioiron as influenced by disease; synthesis of certain known and a number of new aryl-substituted cysteines and the demonstration of their biological acetylation; and a study of the fate of iron liberated during red cell destruction by acetylphenylhydrazine.

His research papers appeared in the Journal of Biological Chemistry, Organic Syntheses, American Review of Tuberculosis, Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine, Journal of Nutrition, Federation Proceedings, American Journal of Physiology, Archives of Biochemistry, American Journal of Roentgenology and Radium Therapy, Journal of Bacteriology, Southern Medical Journal and Proceedings of the National Institute of Science. Two additional papers on regional schools appeared in Christian Advocate, v. 125, p. 6, 1950, and the Meharry Medical College Bulletin, v. 47, p. 5, 1951.

Dr. West was the first Ph.D. to join the Meharry staff. His research was supported by the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, the Nutrition Foundation, the Committee on Scientific Research of the American Medical Association, and the National Institutes of Health. In the first four years of the graduate degree program which he initiated, six students earned the master's degree in biochemistry.

In high school Dr. West showed all the positive traits of character which marked his entire career. He was of solid, sturdy build and deliberate in movement. He played on the Dunbar football team in his senior year. His demeanor was always modest and his dress conservative, "rich but not gaudy" (see photo). He was always a good student, well liked and moderately active in class affairs. Significant success was predicted for him, a prophecy eminently realized.

As a medical student at Meharry, the junior author had the pleasure of studying biochemistry under Dr. West in 1947-48. Upon entering Meharry, many of us felt that we were embarking on uncharted seas. There were unfounded fears of impending failure and catastrophe. Fortunately, Dr. West was one of our first professors. He quickly dispelled those fears and integrated us into the medical family of Meharry.

Dr. West was an outstanding teacher, researcher, administrator, and humanitarian. He greeted the students

Dr. West at the age of 16 on the sidewalk in front of Dunbar High School in May 1921.

with a broad smile, irrespective of whether he was in the classroom, laboratory or corridor. His lectures were well illustrated, lucid, thorough, dynamic, challenging and thought-provoking. Students were freely permitted to ask questions during his lectures. His office was always open for students to discuss problems, which were often personal.

Dr. West was not a purist who showed interest only in complex biochemical formulae and metabolic pathways. His lectures stressed biochemical changes in human physiology which were correlated with changes in disease processes. He placed in perspective the use of biochemical tests in the diagnosis and treatment of disease.

He was an extremely modest and humble person. During the junior author's association with him, the fact that he was the first to synthesize the amino acid, threonine, was never mentioned by him. He was highly perceptive and displayed the wisdom of Solomon.

Dr. West was highly esteemed by the students. His ability as a teacher was unquestioned. On occasions information was leaked that Dr. West "stood up" for the students when adverse policies affecting them were debated among the faculty and administration. This type of devotion to student welfare endeared Dr. West to all who knew him.

He extended himself beyond the classroom in helping to train physicians, dentists and allied health professionals. When Dr. West became ill in the late 1940's, many students were worried and showed deep concern. After a few days of hospitalization, Dr. West had recovered. When he returned to the classroom, the entire school breathed more easily.

Under Dr. West's administration as president, Meharry's endowment increased from $4 million to $7 million. He always encouraged research and the $80.000 supporting research at beginning of his administration had grown to more than $1 million at his retirement.

His terminal illness was protracted and disabling, but it did not deter him from working periodically on a complete history of Meharry Medical College which the institution was very eager for him to prepare.

Dr. West is survived by his widow, Mrs. Jessie Penn West; a daughter, Mrs. Edna Mae West Minaya of Nashville; a son and Meharry medical graduate, Dr. Harold D. West, Jr., of Kansis City, Mo.; two grandchildren, Harold D., III and Tonya West of Atlanta, Ga. and two sisters, Mrs. Edna West Payton and Mrs. Marguerite West Coates of Washington, D.C.

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N.B. For additional material on Dr. West in this *Journal* see "Dr. Harold D. West, New President of Meharry," v. 44, pp. 316-317, 1952; "Testimonial Dinner for Meharry President West," v. 55, pp. 245-246, 1965; and v. 66, p. 273, 1974.

CROMOLYN OF VALUE TO YOUNG ASTHMATICS

A drug relatively new in the United States is helping the National Asthma Center at Denever manage severe, chronic asthma in children by reducing the need for steroid drugs. Called cromolyn sodium, the drug was clinically evaluated at the National Asthma Center for the Food and Drug Administration in July 1973 and approved for use in cases of chronic, intractable asthma. It helps prevent asthma attacks in some children, and enables reduction of the dosage of corticosteroid drugs, such as adrenalin, or changing the steroid therapy to alternate rather than daily frequency. When steroid dosages cannot be reduced enough to maintain control over asthma attacks, or changed to the alternate-day basis, cromolyn sodium is used.

In about half such cases, cromolyn sodium helps prevent asthma attacks, permitting lower steroid dosage. For these children, the availability of cromolyn sodium means that they can grow normally and avoid other potential side effects of steroids.

The precise mechanism by which cromolyn sodium works in those children who respond to it is not yet defined. The drug does have the effect of blocking the usual sequence of events which leads from an allergic reaction to an asthma attack. The substances produced at the end of the sequence, such as histamine, can cause constriction of the bronchial tubes, excessive mucous secretion and swelling of the lining of the air passages. Cromolyn sodium apparently throws a roadblock into this usual sequence of biochemical events by inhibiting the MAST cell from releasing its "mediator" substances.

The drug, developed by Dr. Roger Altounyan in England and manufactured by Fisons Corporation, is used in powder form. The powder is contained in a small capsule, which is inserted in a special inhaler containing a little propeller.